

April 2004

SUBJECT: **Fertility Control on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range**

ISSUE SUMMARY: In the last 7 years, BLM monitoring on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range has shown that young mares (2 and 3 year-olds) have been producing foals. In several cases, the energetic demands of gestation and/or lactation had unhealthy impacts on these young mares. Foal production in older mares (14 years of age and older) is limited but can result with mares in poor condition, early deaths and orphaned foals.

AGENCY POSITION: Purely from the standpoint of **compassionate-use\*** of fertility control, the Billings Field Manager has made the decision that 21 age-specific younger and older mares receive a single-dose (primer) of PZP contraceptive vaccine with a follow-up booster at least one month later. This two-shot application is necessary as the primer dose simply acts to enhance the immune system response and does not generally confer infertility. All vaccine will be remotely delivered by certified and experienced darters using capture guns. Any mares, which received a primer injection during FY2003 efforts, will only receive a booster vaccine this year.

These mares include 10 yearling fillies, 4 two-year old fillies and 7 fourteen years of age and older mares. The vaccine would induce one year of infertility, allowing younger mares to mature in a healthier condition, before becoming pregnant. Contraception of younger mares also affords advantages to herd genetic diversity, as mares would have their genetic contributions delayed but not removed from the herd.

Fertility control will allow older mares to live the remainder of their lives in better overall health without the burden of gestation and/or lactation. These mares have already had 12 years of reproductive activity in order to contribute to the genetics of the herd. The long-term intent will be to contracept them for the remainder of their lives.

The BLM's proposal is analyzed in an environmental assessment (EA). The EA is available to the public for a 30-day comment period ending May 10, 2004. The proposed fertility control implementation is scheduled to begin no earlier than July 1, 2004 and conclude by the end of September 2004. Efforts will continue opportunistically until all selected mares are treated.

**\* compassionate-use is defined as "the use of a tool (a fertility control agent) to improve the quality of life of another (a younger or older wild mare)."**

BACKGROUND: Since 1996, several younger and older mares have lost their foals. In many cases, the energetic demands of gestation and/or lactation have had unhealthy impacts on these mares. Most of these mares were in poor condition post-foaling and several younger mares have taken 1-2 years to recover. Foal production in older mares is generally limited but can result with mares in poor condition, early deaths and orphaned foals.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Local landowners and the Pryor Mountain Mustang and Breeders Associations are always interested in activities related to the Pryor Mountain Horse herd and range. In addition, several national animal advocacy groups and humane groups have an interest in the management of the horse herd.

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